

# Community Conversations Focus on High School

**T**his document has two purposes: 1) present the recommendations of the Iowa Learns Council 2, a task force convened by the Governor to improve education in Iowa, and 2) provide nine examples of how high school reform might take place in Iowa's schools. The examples were developed by the Iowa Department of Education based upon a review of the following education programs and publications:

- High Schools That Work
- *Redefinition of High School: A Vision for Iowa, Urban Education Network, 2001*
- *Foundation for Change: Focusing on Iowa High Schools, Iowa State Board of Education, 2002*
- *Executive Summary of Breaking Ranks II, NASSP, 2004*

## Recommendations from the Governor's task force:

Each student will graduate from high school having had opportunities to take challenging, relevant courses that have prepared her/him well for success in post-secondary learning and the workplace. At least 90 percent of all Iowa high school graduates will go on to complete, at a minimum, two years of college or post-secondary training.

## Task Force Address:

<http://www.state.ia.us iowalearns>



There are a variety of ways these recommendations could be accomplished. What follows are examples meant to illustrate possible ways these recommendations might be implemented by a school district. These examples are presented on the assumption that they could apply to all students in high school so that they are all prepared to successfully continue their education.

## ***Challenging, relevant courses could mean...***

### ***Example 1.***

The high school will provide a structured system of extra help designed to enable all students to maximize their learning potential and complete a program that prepares individuals for post-secondary success. A district Resource Management Team comprised of administration, guidance staff, instructional staff, extra-curricular staff, and support staff meets regularly with community agency/organizations to review data that indicate the current level of student needs. This district level team determines ways that time, money, and personnel resources can be coordinated to accommodate students' needs for tutoring, mentoring, acceleration homework support, and additional time to complete assigned work. This school/community team provides these supports, collects information on the effectiveness of these strategies, and continues to review their impact on overall student success.

### ***Example 2.***

Determination of graduation will be based on student mastery of selected standards rather than on accumulation of credits. For example, a student might demonstrate proficiency of the standard, "*The high school graduate can gather relevant information from a variety of print and electronic sources, as well as from direct observations, interviews, and surveys*" through writing a quality research essay for Advanced Composition or Chemistry. Specific coursework will not be the requirement for graduation; mastery of the standard will be the requirement.

### ***Example 3.***

High schools courses will feature integrated/cross discipline instruction designed to emphasize the relevance and application of the curricula. For example, students might learn concepts and develop skills in mathematics, science, language arts, social studies, technology, and foreign language through studying world issues and problems in a course called “Real World Problems.”

### ***Example 4.***

All high school courses will be designed to emphasize the relevance of the curricular area by asking students to apply what they are learning to solve challenging problems common in every day life. For example, students in Construction I and II build a house, while students in a Family and Consumer

Science class design and decorate the interior. Students studying marketing determine the house’s value and sell it. Another example might be that teachers seek opportunities to embed the application of a number of curricular areas within their course content. For instance, an industrial technology teacher might ask students to apply geometric principles to complete a welding project.

## ***Well prepared could mean...***

### ***Example 5.***

Students will have individualized educational plans that link directly with career paths of interest to them. The plan allows the student to design his or her own learning within reasonable parameters and features work experiences and internships. The plan is tailored to best address the student’s interests, abilities, and needs. The plan also includes additional training after high school graduation. The student, his or her parents, and school personnel collaborate to create the plan and meet frequently throughout the high school years to review and revise it as needed.

### ***Example 6.***

Each student will be assigned to one advocate for the duration of high school. The advocate becomes someone the student knows well and feels he or she can go to for support to ensure success in school. In turn, the advocate knows students well enough to hold them accountable for developing and achieving challenging goals. The advocate is also in regular communication with the students’ family. The communication may or may not be frequent, but is common enough that parents/guardians receive positive information about their child’s achievement and know that the

advocate is someone they can contact if they have concerns about progress.

### ***Example 7.***

The high school seeks opportunities for learning beyond the school walls. For example, students earn high school and college credit while taking courses through other high schools, community colleges, or other institutions of higher education. Students have access to Advanced Placement courses in a variety of curricular areas through on-campus or distance learning opportunities. Area high schools have coordinated schedules to allow students to travel from one high school to another nearby to take advantage of course offerings available there. Students are also encouraged to learn and gain high school credit through internships with local businesses.

### ***Example 8.***

Students find their senior year to be a mixture of challenging course work, including the study of mathematics, and internships, entrepreneurial experiences, and work experiences designed for optimum academic and career preparation. The year culminates in a senior project that reflects high school coursework and community-based work done during high school. The student presents this project to a panel consisting of school personnel and community members for evaluation.

### ***Example 9.***

Minimum requirements for graduation from high school will include an academic core program consisting of four years of English, three years of mathematics, science, and social studies. As part of those three years of mathematics and science, all students will be required to successfully complete at least two years of mathematics including Algebra I and Geometry and science including Biology and a physical science course such as Chemistry or Physics.

## **Thank you for your participation...**

